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ABSTRACT

This study examined mothers' conceptualizations of their relationships with their children in relation to the quality of their attachment with them. In a brief interview, 58 mothers were asked about their satisfaction with their relationship with their child and with a non-attachment topic (division of household chores). Mother-child attachment was assessed using the Ainsworth Strange Situation Procedure. Results indicated that mothers in secure attachment relationships with their children were rated more truthful, consistent, realistic, complete, clear in terms of meaning, and clear in terms of discourse as they discussed their satisfaction within the mother-child relationship than were mothers in insecure attachment relationships with their children. Significant differences were also found between mothers in anxious-avoidant and anxious-resistant attachment relationships with their children. As expected, no differences in coherency were found between the same mothers in their response to the non-attachment question. (Author/MDM)

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Maternal Representation of The Mother-Child Relationship As Related to Mother-Child Attachment

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Maternal Representation of The Mother-Child Relationship
As Related to Mother-Child Attachment

Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to examine mothers' conceptualizations of their relationships with their children in relation to the quality of their attachment with them. In a brief interview, mothers were asked about their satisfaction with their relationship with their child and with a non-attachment topic (division of household chores). Interviews were transcribed and coded on seven scales representing different aspects of coherency. Results indicate that in response to the question regarding satisfaction in their relationship with their child, mothers in secure attachment relationships with their toddlers were rated more truthful, consistent, realistic, complete, clear in terms of meaning and clear in terms of discourse than were mothers in insecure attachment relationships with their children. Significant differences were also found between mothers in anxious-avoidant and anxious-resistant attachment relationships with their children. As expected, no differences in coherency were found between the same mothers in their response to the non-attachment question (satisfaction with division of household chores).

Maternal Representation of The Mother-Child Relationship
As Related to Mother-Child Attachment

Introduction

The primary aim of the current study was to gain insight into mothers' conceptualizations of their relationships with their children, and to explore how these representations are related to the quality of the mother-child attachment relationship. According to attachment theorists, the mother's internal working model, which is based on her current conceptualization of early experiences with her primary caregiver, is a significant determinant of the relationship she will have with her own child. Therefore, the mother is not merely reacting or responding to the infant, but is bringing forth an organized set of beliefs, feelings and expectations about attachment relationships into her relationship with her own child.

Several studies have shown that mothers' representations of their early childhood experiences influence how they behave as attachment figures with their own children (Bretherton, 1985). Morris (1980) found that women who reported unstable family relationships as children, and who reported that their mothers were low in nurturance and competence were more likely to have children who were insecurely attached. In addition, Ricks (1985) reported a relationship between mothers' reports of acceptance vs. rejection by their own mothers in childhood and their children's security of attachment to them.

Main and her colleagues (George et al, 1985) have advanced intergenerational attachment research through development of the Berkeley Adult Attachment Interview, or the AAI (George et al, 1985), which is designed to assess an adult's overall state of mind with respect to attachment. The AAI is a semi-structured interview which generally varies in length from 40-70 minutes. The interview asks subjects to describe relationships with their parents when they were young, to generate memories to support general impressions, to recall incidences of distress, and to conceptualize relationship influences. AAI transcripts are rated on five nine-point scales: loving vs. unloving (based on autobiographical memories regarding parents), coherency vs. incoherency (reflecting subject's state of mind during interview), idealization (a specific type of incoherence--discrepancy between one's

generalized statements about parents and supporting evidence), lack of memory (based on speaker's stated assessment of his/her memory) and anger (assessment of anger toward parents during the course of the interview).

Main and Goldwyn (in press) have found that mother's current state of mind with respect to attachment, as assessed by the AAI, predicts the quality of her attachment relationship with her child. Specifically, mothers of babies classified as secure in the Strange Situation Procedure seemed to value attachment relationships and experiences and regard them as influential, but were also objective and independent in evaluating their attachment relationships, (e.g., "I love my father very much, but of course, I realize that he's not perfect.") The most distinguishing feature of the mothers of secure children was their coherency. These mothers directly addressed interviewers' queries, supported general statements with episodic examples, presented a clear and unified picture of their past relationships and their influences, and generally seemed at ease with the interview, (e.g., "I was spoiled as a child in terms of material things. My parents gave me lots of toys to make up for not being able to spend time with me, but I would have rather had my parents.") Adults who were able to present clear, integrated, believable accounts of their childhood experiences were classified as having secure working models, even if they reported negative early experiences.

Mothers of children classified as anxious-avoidant actively dismissed and/or devalued relationships, attachment experiences and their influences. They were likely to idealize their parents (e.g., "I would never argue with my mother because she was always right. She really was."). Frequently, raters concluded that these mothers were rejected by their own parents in terms of attachment-related feelings and behaviors. When these mothers were able to acknowledge that their parents were rejecting, they usually stated that the rejection had no effect on them, (e.g., "My mother left when I was four years old but, you know, I never really missed her that much.") Raters, however judged these mothers' reports of having perfect parents or not being hurt by early experiences of

rejection to be unrealistic or not believable because they were unsubstantiated. Often, raters judged the account to be incomplete or lacking pertinent information. Adults who presented unbelievably idealized or incomplete accounts of childhood or who minimized the importance of attachment-related experiences were classified as having a dismissing working model of attachment.

Lastly, mothers of anxious-ambivalent children appeared preoccupied with their relationships with their own parents. They also were confused and unable to be objective about these relationships. These parents appeared to be highly involving or even role-reversing, (e.g., "I remember falling and breaking my arm and my mom really freaked out. She started crying and she didn't know what to do.") Often the mothers seemed presently driven to please their parents. These mothers often showed intense anger towards the parents, (e.g., "She blamed it on me. It was so horrible. She didn't have to blame that on me, but she did."); and also often presented themselves as passive in regard to conflict with their parents, (e.g., "It wasn't me being bad, it was just my father seeing everything I did as bad.") Because they still seemed preoccupied with negative early childhood experiences, these mothers often experienced slips of the tongue, lapsed into unclear jargon, (e.g., "So then my dad had a tizzy"), and easily became lost in thought and went off-topic, presenting irrelevant information. In addition, they sometimes presented a parent as all good and other times as all bad, but were unable to coherently integrate these conflicting views. Adults who present accounts of their early childhood that including inconsistent information that is not coherently integrated, use unclear discourse involving jargon and slips of the tongue, and present irrelevant information, are judged to be caught up in the conflicts of their early parent-child relationship and to have a preoccupied working model of attachment.

Main and Goldwyn (in press) suggest that signals originating externally (from the infant) and internally (from memory) may be similar in the reactions they evoke from parents who are insecure in terms of attachment. Therefore, dismissing mothers may need to devalue infant proximity-seeking and

contact-maintaining in the same way that they devalue memories of early attachment. By keeping the attachment behavioral system de-activated, these mothers avoid painful feelings of rejection. In contrast, the preoccupied mothers of anxious-ambivalent children, while they are not likely to directly reject the infant, may inconsistently respond to their child due to their engrossment with their own role as a child, rather than as a parent. In addition, preoccupied mothers may not be comfortable with their infants' need for separateness since they, themselves, may not have succeeded in gaining autonomy from their own parents. As Main and Goldwyn assert, "...for dismissing and preoccupied adults certain aspects of 'secure base' behavior (approaching, crying, and exploring) may interfere with maintenance of a state of relative de-activation (dismissing) or heightening (preoccupation) of attachment, and thus threaten the 'felt security' of the parent" (Main and Goldwyn, in press, pp. 24-25). Put simply, a mother's feelings about her own attachment relationships should have an impact on the way she feels about her child.

Adult attachment studies primarily have examined how parents' reconstructions of their childhood relationships with their own parents relate to the quality of attachment they have with their own children. Parents' representations, however, regarding their relationship with their own children have yet to be examined. Studies in the area of Maternal Separation Anxiety (Hock 1984; Martin-Huff 1982) have explored parents' affective <u>behavior</u> with their children in relation to parent-child attachment, but not their <u>mental representations</u> of their relationships with them.

Thus, the primary goal of the present study was to explore mothers' conceptualizations of their relationships with their children in relation to the quality of their attachment with their children. We predicted that satisfaction with the mother-child relationship would be a salient attachment issue and therefore, mothers would exhibit individual differences in attachment strategies, similar to those evoked in the AAI, when asked to talk about their relationship satisfaction with their children. That is, we predicted that there would be a concordance between the ability of the mother to speak coherently,

truthfully and in a highly intelligible manner about her relationship with her child and the security of the mother-child attachment. We were especially interested in examining how individual differences in mother-child attachment would relate to differences in particular patterns of discourse coherence, expected to emerge when mothers discussed their relationships with their children. Specifically, we expected to find two basic patterns of incoherent discourse. In one pattern, mothers would present accounts which seemed incomplete (omitting pertinent information) and unrealistic (idealized). In a second pattern, mothers would present confused and rambling accounts characterized by anomalous discourse (e.g., slips of the tongue), an inability to stay on-topic, and representation of inconsistent evidence (logical and factual contradictions).

Because of their fully integrated and flexible working models of attachment, we expected that mothers of secure children would have the ability to clearly and objectively evaluate their relationship with their own child and would be able and willing to support more general statements with episodic examples. We also expected that compared with mothers of secure and anxious-resistant children, mothers of anxious-avoidant children would be less able or willing to completely answer questions or support extremely positive statements they made about their relationship with their child due to the deactivation of the attachment system experienced by such mothers in attachment-salient situations. These mothers' accounts were expected to be less complete and to seem less realistic because they would not be as likely to be supported with episodic examples. Finally, we expected that mothers of anxious-resistant children would be less able to present a clear and consistent picture of their relationship with their child than mothers of secure and anxious-avoidant children. Because of their current preoccupation with attachment-salient issues with their own parents, these mothers also were expected to be more likely to stray off-topic and provide irrelevant information than mothers of secure and anxious-avoidant children.

An additional purpose of the study was to examine whether attachment strategies, assessed

by individual differences in coherence of discourse, would be evoked in an interview that differs in two important ways from the AAI. First, the present interview assesses mothers' relationships with their children rather than with their parents. We expect that thinking about their relationship with their children, and about their role as parents, will evoke mothers' attachment strategies which are based on their current conceptualizations of their relationships with their own parents. Second, the present interview is much briefer than the AAI. Mothers are asked a single question, and they are required to justify their answer in a structured interview which takes about 5-10 minutes to administer. In contrast, the AAI asks 18 questions with accompanying probes and takes 40-75 minutes to administer. If indeed this briefer interview, focused on a different attachment-related topic, evokes similar attachment-related discourse strategies as the AAI, aspects of adults' current states of mind with regard to attachment may be assessed with a wider assortment of instruments than previously thought.

The final goal of the present study was to examine the extent to which mother-infant attachment security predicts mothers' state of mind regarding their relationship with their toddlers, independent of their general verbal intelligence or ability to speak coherently. To establish that the quality of mother-child attachment predicts mothers' states of mind (and their coherency of discourse) regarding only attachment-salient issues, it is necessary to establish that any relationship found between attachment quality and coherence of discourse in discussing the mother-child relationship is not due simply to an underlying factor of general verbal ability. Based on evidence recently presented by Bakermans-Kranenburg and Van Ijzendoorn (in press), indicating that adult attachment status does not relate to performance IQ nor to verbal IQ, we did not expect quality of mother-child attachment to relate to mother's IQ.

It is also necessary to establish that quality of mother-child attachment is related only to coherence in discussing attachment-salient topics. Discourse regarding education and employment

experiences has been shown not to relate to attachment classification (Waters et al., submitted for publication). We will compare mothers' coherency of discourse regarding an attachment-salient topic to mothers' coherency of discourse regarding a non-attachment topic in terms of how each relates to the quality of their mother-child attachment relationship. We predicted that, unlike satisfaction with the mother-child relationship, division of household chores is not a salient attachment issue, and, therefore, coherency of mothers' discourse around this topic would not relate to the quality of attachment mothers had with their children.

Method

Subjects

Subjects included fifty-eight mother-child dyads who are part of the larger Austin Longitudinal Project, a five-year, 66-family study. Intact, two-parent families were recruited from high-quality child care centers in Austin. At the time of recruitment, all families were intact, two-parent families. Families received $50 for participation in the Strange Situation and $25 for each subsequent phase. Spouses' combined annual income averaged $50,000. All but one parent had at least one year of college education, and 84% of the wives and 92% of husbands had college degrees. Fifty-five percent of the husbands and 38% of the wives had completed some graduate school. All husbands,and 74% of wives were employed. Mothers ranged in age from 24 to 41 with the average age of mothers in this sample being 33 years.

Procedure

Assessment of mother-child attachment. When children were eighteen months old, they were brought into the University of Texas Child and Family Lab with their mothers for the Ainsworth Strange

Situation Procedure. Mary Ainsworth's Strange Situation Procedure is the standard measure of infant-caregiver attachment, and has been demonstrated to have both concurrent and predictive validity for use with 12- to 18-month-old infants (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). In this procedure, the infant is observed across a series of increasingly stressful situations involving separations from the parent.

Infant behavior in the Strange Situation was video-taped, scored for avoidance and resistance to the parent during the reunion episodes and classified as secure, anxious-ambivalent or anxious-avoidant. Generally, infants who show some concern during separation, then actively seek proximity, contact or interaction with the parent following separations, and then readily return to exploration or play are judged secure in their attachment to their parent; infants who seem indifferent during separation, then actively avoid and ignore their parent upon reunion are termed anxious-avoidant; and infants who show strong distress at separation, but combine contact-seeking with contact resistance and cannot be comforted upon reunion are judged anxious-ambivalent. Each mother-infant dyad was assessed by at least two coders, trained on the coding scheme at the Institute for Child Development coding workshop by Dr. Alan Sroufe and Dr Brian Vaughn. In the case of disagreements, a third trained coder was brought in to mediate.

Interview Procedure. When children were 26-months-old, the families were visited at home by two undergraduate students. The students administered a number of interview and questionnaire measures to both parents, and also observed parent-child interaction. However only Domains of Satisfaction Interview (DOSI) data will be reported in the present study. This semi-structured interview was derived from a measure originally used to study newlywed couples (McHale & Huston, 1985), and contains multiple domains of family life, each of which is rated in terms of satisfaction on a scale from one to nine. Respondents were then asked to substantiate their ratings with both positive and negative statements about the domain. In this study, we examined interviews concerning mothers'

satisfaction with the domains of the mother-child relationship and the division of household chores.

The following are the specific Domains of Satisfaction questions used in this study: 1) During the past two months, on this scale of one to nine, how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with the way you and your child have been getting along with each other, the way each of you acts when you are together? 2) During the past two months, on this scale of one to nine, how satisfied or dissatisfied have you been with the division of household chores?

After initial numerical ratings were given by the subjects, interviewers probed for justifications for the ratings given by saying things such as, "Can you tell me what led you to rate that a five?", "Why would you not rate it any higher than a five?" and "Why would you not rate it any lower than a five?" Interviewers were instructed to probe until at least two positive and two negative justifications had been made about the mother-child relationship by the mother.

To assess coherency, seven scales based on the coherency vs. incoherency and idealization scales used by Main and Goldwyn (in press) were used in evaluating interview transcripts of mother's reasons for satisfaction (or lack of satisfaction) in their relationships with their children. To examine particular patterns of discourse coherency, the transcripts were coded on the following scales: 1) Clear Discourse, 2) Clear Meaning, 3) Truthful , 4) Consistent, 5) Realistic, 6) Complete, and 7) Relevant.

Interviews were transcribed, then coded twice on seven scales of coherency, once by the first author (who coded some of the Strange Situations), and once by the third author, who was completely unfamiliar with the subject sample. The seven scales of coherency were based on the coherency vs. incoherency and idealization Scales used by Main and Goldwyn (in press). The coherency vs. incoherency scale was broken down into six individual scales in order to assess various components of coherency: 1) *Realistic*. This scale is essentially the same as Main and Goldwyn's idealization scale except that it assesses idealization toward the subject's child rather than her parents. As such it assesses the extent to which information was provided to confirm *extremely positive* general

statements. A low score was given to mothers who seemed to idealize the parent-child relationship and were unable or unwilling to substantiate high satisfaction ratings or other positive statements with episodic evidence, e.g. a mother who gave a satisfaction rating of "9", then said nothing positive about the relationship. The scale was renamed Realistic so that it could be scored in a positive direction like the other 6 scales. 2) *Clear Discourse.* This scale assesses the extent to which words are used accurately and specifically enough to convey particular ideas clearly, and are combined and ordered in an appropriate fashion. A low rating would indicate use of verbal anomalies such as slips of the tongue, jargon, overly vague terms or any other unusual use of language not appropriate for expressing ideas in this interview, e.g. "My daughter is fixated at the oral stage of development." 3) *Clear Meaning*. This scale assesses the speaker's ability to exhibit a rational flow of ideas. Rather than assessing obscurity of meaning caused by word selection or combination (as in Clear Discourse), this scale assesses coherence at the level of whole thoughts. Low scores for clear meaning were given to mothers whose discourse simply did not make sense, e.g. "Our relationship is like a tall mountain. It's very humorous." 4) *Truthful.* This scale assesses the believability of the evidence given to support numerical ratings and general statements. Low scores on truth were given to mothers who were unable or unwilling to provide confirming information regarding positive or negative statements, e.g. a mother who described her relationship with her child as extremely difficult, but could not offer an episodic example to illustrate the closeness when asked to do so. 5) *Consistent*. This scale assesses the extent to which the evidence presented was consistent and without logical and/or factual contradictions. Low scores were given to mothers who appeared to hold conflicting views simultaneously, e.g. a mother described her relationship as extremely difficult but later said she feels very relaxed with her child, without making an appropriate transition between the statements. 6) *Complete*. This scale assesses the extent to which questions were answered without omissions of pertinent information. A low score was given to mothers who failed to answer questions, or parts of

questions, posed by the interviewer, e.g. The interviewer asked the mother to explain what is good about her relationship with her child and she replied, "It just is." 7) *Relevant*. This scale assesses the subject's ability to stay on-topic and to directly address the all queries. A low score was given to mothers who strayed from the topic, e.g. A mother who was asked to justify her satisfaction rating instead began talking about her bridge club.

Assessment of mothers' verbal intelligence. When children were 32-months-old, mothers were administered the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised (WAIS-R) Vocabulary Subtest as part of a follow-up home visit. The WAIS-R Vocabulary Subtest is a measure of adult verbal ability consisting of a list of vocabulary items graded in difficulty which the subject is asked to define (Wechsler, 1955). For adult samples between the ages of 25 and 64, the vocabulary subtest is correlated .85 with the full verbal scale.

Results

First, subjects with missing data were compared to subjects with complete data sets to determine if there were significant differences between the complete vs. incomplete groups in terms of attachment classification. Twenty-one out of the original sixty-six dyads in the Austin Longitudinal Project were excluded from this analysis because either they had moved away, or their interview audio-tapes were damaged. It was found that the complete and incomplete groups did not differ in terms of attachment classification $F(2,63) = .15$, (n.s.).

Inter-rater reliabilities on the seven rating scales ranged from correlations of .47 to .87. The average inter-rater reliability across the scales was .68. Reliability was satisfactory on all scales, therefore it was decided to use only the ratings made by the rater who was completely unfamiliar with the sample for the data analysis.

Interrelationships of rating scales

As shown in Table 1, the seven rating scales were highly intercorrelated on the attachment-salient question. The corrected item-total correlations of the individual scales with the combined scale of overall coherency ranged from .39 (relevant) to .68 (consistent) with the overall alpha = .73 for the attachment-salient question, as shown in Table 2. Table 1 also includes intercorrelations among the seven rating scales for the non-attachment question. Finally, the corrected item-total correlations of the individual scales with the combined scale of overall coherence ranged from .12 (realistic) to .64 (relevant) with the overall alpha = .68 for the non-attachment question, shown also in Table 2.

Verbal intelligence, coherence, satisfaction ratings and attachment

Verbal intelligence, as measured by the WAIS-R Vocabulary subtest, was shown not to correlate with any of the rating scales of coherence with correlations ranging from .02 to .19. In addition, verbal intelligence was not related to attachment, $F(2,37) = .51$ (n.s.). Similarly, the overall rating of satisfaction with the mother-child relationship also was found not be correlated with any of the rating scales or to relate to attachment, $F(2,42) = .158$ (n.s.).

Mother-child attachment and maternal coherence of discourse regarding the attachment-salient topic

Ratings on the seven scales of coherency based on the attachment-salient domain of satisfaction (satisfaction with the mother-child relationship) were entered into a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). As shown in Table 3A, attachment groups differed on the following scales: Clear Meaning, $F(2,42) = 8.18$, $p < .001$, Consistency $F(2,42) = 12.6$, $p < .001$, Realistic $F(2,42) = 4.17$, $p < .05$, and Truthful $F(2,42) = 2.43$, $p < .10$. Mothers of children in the *secure* group differed from mothers of children in both *insecure* groups on these scales, according to Tukey (HSD) post hoc procedures. Attachment groups differed also in terms of Relevant discourse, $F(2,42) = 10.10$, p.001 and Clear Discourse, $F(2,42) = 5.53$, $p < .05$. Mothers of children in the *anxious-resistant* group were less relevant in their speech and exhibited more verbal anomalies than mothers of children in either the

anxious-avoidant or *secure* groups, according to Tukey (HSD) post hoc procedures. Attachment groups did not differ in Completeness $F(2,42) = 1.90$(n.s.).

Thus, mothers of children in the secure group were found to be more clear in terms of meaning, consistent, truthful and realistic than mothers of children in the anxious-avoidant or anxious-resistant groups when speaking about their relationship with their child. In addition, mothers of children in the anxious-resistant group were more likely to exhibit anomalous discourse and stray off-topic than mothers in the other two groups.

Mother-child attachment and maternal coherence of discourse regarding non-attachment topic

Ratings on the seven scales of coherency based on the non-attachment domain of satisfaction (satisfaction with division of household chores) were entered into a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). As shown in Table 3b, attachment groups did not differ on any of the seven coherency scales.

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to investigate whether the topic of satisfaction with the mother-child relationship would activate mothers' attachment strategies, as do the topics covered in the Adult Attachment Interview. Attachment theory suggests that discourse on non-attachment issues, (e.g. one's job), are independent of one's state of mind with respect to attachment and, therefore, should not yield differences in discourse coherence indicative of one's primary attachment strategy (Waters et al., submitted for publication). However, it was predicted that satisfaction with the mother-child relationship would be attachment-salient and, therefore, would elicit differences in speech indicative of one's primary attachment strategy.

Based on the results of this study, satisfaction with the mother-child relationship does seem to be a topic which activates one's attachment-related strategies, given that mothers of secure children

were more coherent in speaking about their satisfaction in their relationship with their child. In the following example, the mother integrates her conflicting feelings and speaks objectively about her relationship with her child, yielding a passage which is readily comprehendible.

M: She is very easy to get along with. She's very outgoing, easy to engage with, responsive. We get along. She's easy to get along with. She acts like herself and I act like myself. The only reason maybe why I wouldn't have said a nine is that, of course, she's coming on two and a half and she is hitting sometimes. She has a mind of her own, and sometimes we clash in that way.

In contrast, mothers of anxious-avoidant children tended to be less consistent and realistic in their discussion. They were frequently unable to back up positive statements with evidence illustrating why they were satisfied. Instead, they gave reasons explaining why they were not dissatisfied, as illustrated in the following example:

I: Could you tell me why you rated that a nine?

M: I think that we're very al.. that, that, our personal, my son and my personalities mesh and that he's very easy to deal with. I mean I don't have to tell him, we don't, try not to use the word "no" because that's what his schools do. But I don't have to discipline him in the, .. very much. I mean, he's just very easy.

Mothers of anxious-resistant children tended also to be inconsistent in their views as illustrated in the following example:

M: ...So, it's a challenge. But, I'd say all in all, she's a pretty happy child...When we communicate. Not that she can speak so well. She voices her opinion quite openly. Kinda makes it fun sometimes when she gets to be such a little boss.

Mothers of children in the anxious-resistant group differed from both mothers of anxious-avoidant children and mothers of secure children in that they tended to bring up irrelevant information

and to get distracted from the interview topic. For example, when asked to justify her high rating on satisfaction, a mother gave the following response:

> *M: ...And I'm real excited when I pick her up. And she's always real excited to see me when I pick her up. And she's real excited about her art work. She really likes her teacher in school.*

Evidence from this study suggests that mothers who are not threatened by their child's need for nurturance, and who are able to freely respond to their child in a sensitive and consistent manner, are also able to coherently discuss their relationship with their child. Such mothers seem to possess a current state of mind with respect to attachment which is objective, flexible and well-integrated. These characteristics are directly reflected in the interview transcripts. Mothers of securely attached children can openly acknowledge negative aspects of their relationship with their children, and can integrate these with the positive aspects to form a clear and realistic account of the relationship.

In contrast, mothers of children in the anxious-avoidant and anxious-resistant groups may be threatened by their children's attachment-eliciting behaviors and may be less able to respond to their children's bids for closeness. If mothers of anxious-avoidant children have a dismissing state of mind regarding attachment, as research linking mothers' adult attachment strategies to the security of attachment they have with their own infants suggests (Main and Goldwyn, in press), these mothers may be defended against acknowledging any imperfections in the relationships with their own children just as they are defended against acknowledging imperfections in their relationship with their own parents (Main and Goldwyn, in press). As a result, mothers of children in the anxious-avoidant group appeared unable to honestly and realistically access and discuss their feelings about their relationship with their children.

Mothers of children in the anxious-resistant group, on the other hand, are caught up or enmeshed in the negative effects of attachment experiences and are unable to gain perspective on their

past relationships with their own parents. Main and her colleagues (in press) have found that mothers who have preoccupied states of mind (the most common pattern for mothers of resistant children) are likely to get sidetracked or lost in their own thoughts when discussing attachment-related issues because they have not yet resolved painful experiences they had with their own parents in the past. Thus, to the extent that discussion of their relationships with their own children awakens these unresolved difficulties with past attachment relationships, their discourse will be less clear, meaningful, consistent and relevant than that of secure mothers, as found in this study.

A second goal of this study was to investigate whether one relatively brief interview provides enough discourse to discern attachment-relevant discourse strategies. Based on the results, attachment strategies corresponding to the secure and anxious-resistant groups were clearly discernable. However, strategies corresponding to the anxious-avoidant groups were less so, particularly those assessed by the Complete scale. A closer examination of the scales designed to assess speech patterns typical of mothers in the anxious-avoidant group (Truth, Realistic and Complete) may be necessary to understand their relative failure to differentiate avoidant adult attachment strategies. These three scales assess lack of evidence to support general statements (Truth), lack of evidence to support positive statements (Realistic) and lack of adequate discourse to satisfy the interviewer queries (Complete). The commonality among these three scales is their assessment of an aspect of discourse which is lacking. In other words, low scores are assigned on Truth, Realistic and Complete when a necessary piece of discourse is absent, rather than when a characteristic of discourse is present as with the four other scales, Clear Meaning, Clear Discourse, Relevant and Consistent. Because the Domains of Satisfaction interview transcripts in our study are all relatively brief, transcripts of mothers in anxious-avoidant relationships may not appear different from transcripts of mothers in the two other groups simply because they haven't had adequate opportunity to exhibit an idealizing or dismissing strategy. In particular, a low rating on Complete is

unlikely to be meaningful in a context in which a brief response is expected. A lengthier interview with several questions might better assess subjects who are overly succinct. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the mothers of anxious-avoidant children did differ from mothers of secure children on Realistic and differed marginally from them on Truthful.

The final goal of the present study was to compare mothers' coherency of discourse on attachment-salient vs. non-attachment topics in terms of how each relates to the quality of their relationship with their child. Our data support the hypothesis that coherency of discourse regarding non-attachment issues does not relate to the quality of the mother-child attachment relationship. According to attachment theorists, no relationship would be expected due to the absence of activation of mothers' internal working models of attachment relationships during their responses to the non-attachment question. That is, because satisfaction with division of household chores is not primarily an attachment issue, mental representations of attachment relationships are not elicited. Therefore attachment strategies are not exhibited in discourse as they are during the Adult Attachment Interview or during discourse involving satisfaction with one's child.

Little is known about the nature of mental representations themselves, and how they influence behavior as well as language. In our study, it appears that mothers' representations of attachment relationships mediate their discourse involving their mother-child relationships as well as their behavior in those relationships. It is impossible to discern from these data, however, the processes involved in development of speech patterns related to one's mental representations of attachment. Additionally, it is not clear at which point topics become attachment-salient and evoke attachment-related discourse strategies. It may be that any topics which involve intimate self-other relationships are capable of eliciting attachment strategies. In addition, topics which involve perceived threats of physical or psychological harm may be attachment-salient, in which case attachment-eliciting topics may vary a great deal from person to person. Pertinent future research could include a series of interview domains

or topics in decreasing degree of intimacy, starting with the self-primary caregiver relationship. This could provide us with information concerning which relationships or topics elicit one's internal working models of attachment relationships and corresponding attachment strategies.

Table 1: Intercorrelations of Seven Scales of Coherency for Attachment-Salient Question

	Clear Meaning	Truthful	Consistent	Realistic	Complete	Relevant
Clear Discourse	.61***	.24	.38*	.27	-.01	.45**
Clear Meaning		.39*	.64**	.41*	.07	.29
Truthful			.44*	.77**	.48**	.14
Consistent				.52**	.26	.42*
Realistic					.24	.22
Complete						.09

Intercorrelations of Seven Scales of Coherency for Non-Attachment Question

	Clear Meaning	Truthful	Consistent	Realistic	Complete	Relevant
Clear Discourse	.56**	-.12	.45*	-.08	-.27	.58**
Clear Meaning		.26	.59**	.11	.06	.54**
Truthful			.00	.11	.81**	.25
Consistent				.24	.03	.45*
Realistic					.09	.10
Complete						.18

TABLE 2

Relationship of Seven Scales to Overall Scale of Coherency for Attachment-Salient Question

Scale	Item-total Correlation
CLEAR DISCOURSE	.48
CLEAR MEANING	.62
TRUTHFUL	.64
CONSISTENT	.68
REALISTIC	.62
COMPLETE	.26
RELEVANT	.39

**Standardized Item Alpha = .73

Relationship of Seven Scales to Overall Scale of Coherency for Non-Attachment Question

Scale	Item-total Correlation
CLEAR DISCOURSE	.27
CLEAR MEANING	.62
TRUTHFUL	.37
CONSISTENT	.48
REALISTIC	.12
COMPLETE	.24
RELEVANT	.64

**Standardized Item Alpha = .68

Table 3A: Attachment-Salient Question

	Attachment Classification			F-Value
	Anxious-Avoidant	Secure	Anxious-Resistant	
Scale Score				
Clear Discourse	x = 5.14a sd = 1.46	x = 5.68a sd = 1.09	x = 4.00b sd = 1.94	5.53**
Clear Meaning	x = 4.29a sd = 1.60	x = 5.68b sd = 1.12	x = 3.70a sd = 2.00	8.18***
Truthful	x = 4.57a sd = 1.72	x = 5.57b sd = 1.35	x = 4.70a sd = 1.16	2.43+
Consistent	x = 5.14a sd = 1.87	x = 6.74b sd = .67	x = 4.70a sd = 1.77	12.60***
Realistic	x = 4.71a sd = 2.14	x = 6.18b sd = 1.25	x = 4.90a sd = 1.80	4.17*
Complete	x = 5.43 sd = 1.62	x = 5.79 sd = 1.17	x = 6.10 sd = .99	.64
Relevant	x = 7.00a sd = .00	x = 6.77a sd = .63	x = 5.50b sd = 1.43	10.10***

Note: Multivariate test [$F(7,42) = 72.00$, $p < .001$]

Table: 3B Non-Attachment Question

	Attachment Classification			F-Value
	Anxious-Avoidant	Secure	Anxious-Resistant	
Scale Score				
Clear Discourse	x = 4.86 sd = 1.35	x = 5.50 sd = .91	x = 5.28 sd = 1.20	1.15
Clear Meaning	x = 5.29 sd = 1.11	x = 5.38 sd = .90	x = 5.28 sd = 1.11	.47
Truthful	x = 5.57 sd = .54	x = 5.04 sd = 1.18	x = 5.70 sd = .95	.19
Consistent	x = 6.00 sd = .00	x = 5.85 sd = .46	x = 5.70 sd = .95	.58
Realistic	x = 6.00 sd = .00	x = 5.85 sd = .37	x = 5.80 sd = .42	.69
Complete	x = 5.86 sd = .38	x = 5.15 sd = 1.12	x = 5.60 sd = .70	.17
Relevant	x = 5.31 sd = .49	x = 5.73 sd = .67	x = 5.50 sd = .97	.69

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